

Saint-Rémy, 17 or 18 June 1889

My dear Theo,

Thank you for yesterday's letter. Me too, I cannot write as I would like to, but after all we live in such a disturbed time that there can be no way of having firm enough opinions to form any judgment of things. I should have liked very much to know if you are still eating together in the restaurant or whether you are living more at home. I hope so, for in the long run that must be best. Things are going well with me. You will understand that after almost half a year now of absolute frugality in eating, drinking, smoking, with two-hour baths twice a week of late, it's evident that this must calm me a lot. So it's all going very well, and as for the work, it occupies and distracts me - which I am in great need of - far from exhausting me. I am glad to hear that Isaïcson has found some things in my consignment that please him. He and De Haan seem very faithful, and that is so rare nowadays that one must appreciate it. And I am also glad to hear that someone else has turned up who actually found something in the figure of the woman in black and yellow. That does not surprise me, though I think that the merit is mostly in the model and not in my painting. I despair of ever finding models. Ah, if now and then I had someone like that or like the woman who sat for La Berceuse, I'd do something very different yet. I think you were right not to show any pictures of mine at the exhibition that Gauguin and the others had. My not yet being recovered is reason enough for my keeping out of it without offending them. I think that unquestionably Gauguin and Bernard have great and real merit. And for beings like them, young and very vigorous, who must live and try to pave their own way - it is quite understandable that it would be impossible to turn all their canvases to the wall until it should please people to admit them into something, into the official stew. You cause a stir by exhibiting in cafes; I do not say it is not in bad taste to do it, but I myself have this crime on my conscience twice over, as I exhibited at the Tambourin and at the Avenue de Clichy, without counting the upset caused to 81 worthy anthropophagi of the good town of Arles and their excellent mayor. So in any case I am worse and more to blame than they, as far as that goes, in causing stir enough, my word, quite involuntarily. Little Bernard - I think - has already done some absolutely astonishing canvases in which there is a sweetness and something essentially French and sincere of rare quality. After all, neither he nor Gauguin are artists who could ever look as if they were trying to get into a universal exhibition by the back stairs. Be reassured about this. That they could not hold their tongues is very understandable. That the impressionist movement has had no unity proves that they aren't as skilled fighters as other artists such as Delacroix and Courbet. Finally, I have a landscape with olive trees and also a new study of a starry sky. Though I have not seen either Gauguin's or Bernard's last canvases, I am pretty well convinced that these two studies I mention are parallel in feeling. When you have looked at these two studies for some time, and that of the ivy as well, it will perhaps give you some idea, better than words could, of the things that Gauguin and Bernard and I sometimes used to talk about, and which we've thought about a good deal. It is not a return to the romantic or to religious ideas, no. Nevertheless, by going the way of Delacroix, more than is apparent, by colour and a more spontaneous drawing than delusive accuracy, one could express the purer nature of a countryside compared with the suburbs and cabarets of Paris. One would try to paint human beings who are also more serene and pure than Daumier had before his eyes, but following Daumier in the drawing, of course. Whether it exists or not is something we may leave aside, but we do believe that nature extends beyond St. Ouen. Perhaps even while reading Zola, we are moved by the sound of the pure French of Renan, for instance. And after all, while the Chat Noir draws women after its fashion and Forain in a fashion that's masterly, we do some of our own, and being less Parisian but no less fond of Paris and its graces, we try to prove that something very different exists as well.

Gauguin, Bernard and I may stop at that point perhaps and not conquer, but neither shall we be conquered; perhaps we exist neither for the one thing nor for the other, but to give consolation or to prepare the way for a painting that will give even greater consolation.

Perhaps Isaïcson and De Haan will not succeed either, but in Holland they felt the compulsion to maintain that Rembrandt did great painting and not delusive photography; they also felt something that was different.

If you can get the Bedroom re-canvassed, it would be better to have it done before sending it to me.

I have no more white at all, at all.

You would give me great pleasure by writing again soon. I so often think that after some time your marriage, I hope, will give you back your old vigour, and that a year from now you will be in better health. What I should very much like to have to read here now and then would be a Shakespeare. There is one at a shilling, Dick's Shilling Shakespeare, which is complete. There are plenty of editions, and I think the cheap ones have been altered less than the more expensive ones. In any case I don't want one that costs more than 3 francs.

Meanwhile, whatever is too bad in this batch, put it aside altogether - no use having stuff like that about; it may be useful later on to remind me of things. Whatever is good in it will show up better in a smaller number of canvases.

The rest are only worth putting flat in some corner between two sheets of cardboard with some old newspapers between the studies.

I am sending you a roll of drawings.

Handshakes to you, to Jo, and our friends.

Ever yours, Vincent

The drawings - Hospital at Arles, the Weeping Tree in the Grass, the Fields and the Olive trees are a continuation of those old ones of Montmajour, the others are hasty studies made in the garden.

The Shakespeare is not urgent, if they haven't got an edition like that, it doesn't take an eternity to order it. Do not fear that I shall ever, of my own will, risk the dizzy heights, unfortunately we are subject to the circumstances and the maladies of our time, whether we like it or not. But with the many precautions I now take I am not likely to relapse, and I hope that the attacks will not begin again.